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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE

RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1745

INFO RUEHZN/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHKV/AMEMBASSY KYIV PRIORITY 0534

RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 6031

RUEHSI/AMEMBASSY TBILISI PRIORITY 0484

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 PARIS 000114

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/22/2018

TAGS: PREL PGOV MARR NATO FR RU IR GG UP AG

SUBJECT: SARKOZY, KOUCHNER ADVISERS ON NATO, RUSSIA, IRAN,
AND SARKOZY

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: On January 16, Joseph Wood, Deputy Assistant to the Vice President for National Security Affairs, met with Philippe Errera, strategic affairs adviser to FM Kouchner, and Francois Richier, strategic affairs adviser to President Sarkozy. Errera and Richier provided their views on NATO, ESDP, Russia, the Iran NIE, and President Sarkozy's own guiding principles. Both advisers emphasized that French reintegration into NATO needs thorough consideration and is unlikely to take place before 2009. They shared their concerns about recent signals from Russia and described the "disastrous" consequences of the Iran NIE on international efforts. Finally, they shared their perspectives on the principles that underlie President Sarkozy's dynamic administration, including France's desire to be influential on the world scene while maintaining close relations with its allies. END SUMMARY.

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NATO Reintegration -- Not Before 2009
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¶12. (C) Both Richier and Errera noted that President Sarkozy has publicly accepted the principle of French reintegration into NATO. Furthermore, according to Richier, he is the first elected president in France to go on the record as supportive of NATO. The U.S. should not underestimate the attitude shifts that have made reintegration politically feasible today. At the same time, both interlocutors stressed that the GOF will not "rush" into a final decision on reintegration into the military command structure. Richier observed that the 2009 NATO summit would be a reasonable timeframe for the announcement of a final decision, noting the need for a thorough evaluation of the implications of the decision. He added that France's defense white paper will include a vision for French and collective security, but that the exercise will conclude no sooner than the end of April 2008.

¶13. (C) Errera said the GOF prefers the term "normalization" to "reintegration," in part to underscore for domestic political reasons that the NATO of today is not the NATO of previous eras. Errera said that President Sarkozy wants to work for a "new" NATO, and that France needs to be on the inside to work for reform. He stressed that use of the correct terminology should help frame the public dialogue that is certain to ensue in France, despite the lack of public outcry responding to Sarkozy's initial expressions of interest. Richier noted that there is much ignorance in France today about what NATO does; for example, many think ISAF is under UN auspices. Errera pointed out that the

defense white paper commission, which is conducting a broad review of defense and security policy, includes people who are skeptical of NATO.

¶4. (C) Errera characterized this moment as "awkward," given that formal discussions about the form of French reintegration have not yet started. He noted that political commitment and practical considerations had to be developed simultaneously and incrementally, adding that the Joint Chiefs must have a sense for where in NATO French officers would be posted, for example, before a decision is made. Most importantly, he said that France (including Sarkozy's diplomatic adviser Jean-David Levitte) wants to avoid the same mistakes that were made in the 1990s when reintegration was last on the table. To avoid repeating those mistakes, Errera said smaller, practical questions should not be permitted to become pressure points that could block a political decision. Richier said that it would be a mistake to set firm goals today on what had to be achieved before a political decision could be made, and that the overall direction is more important than the specifics. He acknowledged that there is suspicion in Europe regarding France's motivations, and suspicion in France regarding NATO, that will need to be overcome. He pointed to President Sarkozy's scheduled February 1 meeting with NATO SYG Jaap de Hoop Scheffer as one important step to alleviate some concerns.

¶5. (C) Errera said that generally, newer members of NATO will view French reintegration positively, reducing their current suspicion of France for its non-normalized NATO membership. On the other hand, newer members of NATO use NATO jobs to reward their top leadership, and French

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reintegration would put a tight squeeze on command structures and high-level posts. High-level positions are also an issue with Germany and the U.K.

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NATO and ESDP: Inseparably Linked
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¶6. (C) Errera stated that during France's upcoming EU Presidency, President Sarkozy will push hard to strengthen European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), while working for a revitalized NATO. Richier called this a transatlantic effort to strengthen European security, while noting that billing it as an "alternative" to NATO would be both politically and financially absurd. Errera observed that substantive progress on ESDP will be very difficult, partly due to British concerns. Richier expressed hope that European defense budgets could increase, noting that the gap vis--vis the U.S. is growing, but added that if budgets cannot be increased in the short term, efficiency must be increased.

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NATO Enlargement
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¶7. (C) Adriatic 3: Errera said that France is comfortable in principle with each of the Adriatic 3 candidates. In particular, France has "no problems" with Croatian membership. However, Errera said Albania seems to be taking acceptance for granted, and needs to make more of an effort to "clean up" corruption issues. Regarding Macedonia, Errera said the GOM underestimates the seriousness of the name issue for Greece and that the U.S. should not make the same mistake. France will not pressure Greece on this issue. Furthermore, if Athens were to give in on the name issue, the Greek government could fall, thus bringing in a new government which would be responsible for -- and presumably hostile to -- the NATO enlargement ratification progress.

¶8. (C) Georgia and Ukraine: Errera said that the GOF does

not want a public dispute with the U.S. on these issues before Bucharest, adding that European allies are hedging because Washington is not sending clear signals. Errera expects that new Ukrainian PM Tymoshenko will come out soon publicly in favor of MAP for Ukraine, a step for which France will "not have a great appetite." Errera said MAP is not just one more step in closer relations, but a serious decision in light of Article 5 commitments. Regarding Georgia, he said Saakashvili "pulled off the election somehow" but still not under ideal circumstances, and that NATO may not be ready for Article 5 guarantees to Georgia either. That said, the GOF has systematically made clear to Russia that there is no Russian redline or veto regarding Ukraine and Georgia. In response, Wood noted that France's hesitation regarding Article 5 commitments implies a de facto "sphere of influence," because Russia is the only possible menace to Ukraine or Georgia.

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Russia: Negative Trends
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¶9. (C) Richier characterized the current Russian regime as revisionist, saying that Putin made much-needed improvements to Russian infrastructure but has gone too far in seeking to restore Russia's grandeur at the expense of international cooperation and development. Among the Russian population, many are culturally and economically oriented towards the West, but remain politically tied to Putin. According to Errera, Russian judgment on important issues is worsening. In the past, Russia has been difficult to work with, but has ultimately made the right decisions -- until recently. As an example, in President Sarkozy's private meeting in Moscow with President Putin, Putin was very hardline on Iran (notwithstanding Russia's exports of fuel for Bushehr), but that in the subsequent press conference, Putin distanced himself on this issue, to Sarkozy's surprise and chagrin. Errera said that in the past, Russia did not mind hurting Iran as long as Russia was not hurt as well; now Russia seems not to want to hurt the Iranians.

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Energy Dependence
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¶10. (C) Both interlocutors noted that France's use of nuclear energy makes it less dependent than some other European countries on Russian oil and gas. That said, Richier expressed concern that Russia is "grabbing" gas infrastructure and supply at a time of military buildup and strong rhetoric. He said that it will be difficult for Europe to agree on a common energy policy, as there is currently no consensus, nor any great ideas, on how to solve the problem. Richier described Russian policies as motivated to obtain short-term profit for individuals, rather than to build long-term, worldwide power. Errera observed that dependence on Russia for energy is better than dependence on Iran, which is the only other real option. He said that Sarkozy had made overtures to Algeria on gas before and during his visit to Algiers, but that France was "stiffed." Nor is there any sense that there will be progress with Algeria on gas in the near term. Errera said that while France seeks a commercial relationship, Algeria views energy cooperation as complicated by history and tinged with a sense of nationalism.

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NIE: "The Best Christmas Gift Ahmadinejad Could Have Imagined"
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¶11. (C) Both interlocutors called the NIE a "disaster" that

has "substantially jeopardized" progress on Iran in the short term and will have lasting consequences, including eliminating France's ability to build consensus in Europe. French views are unchanged, but many others have been affected, and the NIE destroyed not just the momentum of the international community but also what little leverage France and the international community had on less radical Iranian elements. Errera noted that the timing of the release of the NIE was especially bad, with EU Political Directors having been poised for a new UNSC resolution just before the NIE release. He said at the IISS Manama Dialogue in December, speculation was rampant about why the current U.S. administration did not better manage the report's fallout by postponing its release or changing the characterization of Iran's enrichment activities as exclusively civil.

¶12. (C) Both interlocutors said quick passage of a new UNSC resolution, although likely to be a weak, is key. Richier said that Iran has no incentive to negotiate and that the international community's most effective mechanism has been creating a financially difficult operating environment for Iran. If the perception declines in the financial community that investment in Iran is dangerous, this will change. Errera noted the EU might be able to go farther than the Security Council will, perhaps with Gulf countries and/or the G7, to pressure Iran on continued uranium enrichment by raising the price for doing so.

¶13. (C) Errera also said that an intelligence team from the French DGSE traveled to the U.S. recently to meet with their U.S. counterparts regarding the NIE, and was disappointed that the information shared was "even less" than has been reported in the press. This reception did not help the perception shared by some in the GOF that France has not been treated as a full partner by the U.S., despite working side-by-side and fielding criticism following the NIE release.

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Sarkozy's Governing Philosophy
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¶14. (C) Errera said that two clear priorities underlie Sarkozy's administration. The first is realigning French presence with French objectives, and reestablishing French influence where it had been diminished (for example, within the EU, by giving momentum to the simplified EU treaty). Errera said France will maintain its influence in Africa but seeks to rebalance its overseas investments, for example by creating a military base in the UAE. Errera said that France cannot say Iran is a key threat without investing more in the Gulf and that the Iranians will "get the message." He noted that the new base in the UAE will be the first French military installation not in a former colony. Secondly, Errera said that Sarkozy believes in the concept of "the West," making him the first non-Gaullist French president not to consider France an exclusively independent actor. This

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identification provides Sarkozy a clear course for steering French policy even on difficult questions like dealing with Libyan President Qadhafi.

¶15. (C) Richier suggested that Sarkozy's core conviction is that France must be pulled into the 21st century. He said Sarkozy likes to use the metaphor of a person who exercises for the first time in a while -- many muscles may be sore afterwards, but the exercise has done them good. Richier said he sees new energy in French diplomacy, focused on bringing diversity and reconciliation to the global stage. Sarkozy wishes to encourage countries to accept the diversity (ethnic, religious, etc.) within their own societies, as tolerance for others is key to democracy. Sarkozy also recognizes a need for reconciliation and believes the effort to correct the course of a "bad guy" is worthwhile (COMMENT: In public Sarkozy has defended his outreach to Qadhafi and

Hugo Chavez along these lines.) According to Richier, Sarkozy believes the short-term costs of talking to rogue actors by using carrots and helping them move forward are less than the long-term costs of inaction. However, he also recognizes the importance of not creating gaps between the U.S. and Europe in reaching out to "bad guys," marking a departure from previous French governments. Finally, Richier noted that "relations with Islam" and climate change were two immediate priorities of President Sarkozy's that would nevertheless remain on the French agenda.

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